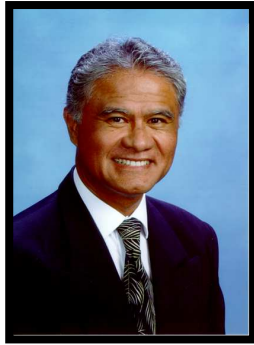




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Legislative Report Wahiawa Neighborhood Board February 27, 2006

Legislative package to Benefit Agriculture in Hawaii

Creating a secure and sustainable future for Hawaii is a top priority for many legislators, myself included. One area that we need to focus on more aggressively is our agricultural industry. Last year, the Legislature passed significant legislation to identify and set aside land exclusively for agricultural use. This session, many of us have sponsored legislation to help our local farmers secure the most vital resource to agricultural growth, a dependable supply of water. Without this, agriculture will never be able to thrive and reach its full potential. When our farmers succeed, our community benefits in many ways.

Proposed legislation provides funding for repair and maintenance of aging statewide public and private irrigation systems and incentives for private landowners to maintain irrigation systems formerly used by sugar and pineapple growers.

The package also calls for a \$50 million special fund for repair and maintenance of irrigation systems, with \$12 million to be directed for immediate improvements to the five irrigation systems most in need. The fund will also be used to repair a total of 15 irrigation systems throughout the state over the next five years and for tax credits and loans for landowners who use private money for the repair and maintenance of irrigation systems on qualifying agricultural land.



Senator Bunda inspects part of the aging irrigation system on the road to Waiialua.



Without much needed improvements to the systems and regular repair and maintenance, the future of agriculture in the district is uncertain.

Army's Deployment to Iraq Could Mean Loss Of Air Emergency Services



Senator Robert Bunda, along with Representative Mike Magaoay and Senator Rosalyn Baker announce the introduction of SB 3146 to appropriate money for continued air rescue service for Oahu.

In response to a recent announcement by the Army that it intends to suspend its Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic Program (MAST) beginning April 1st of this year, my colleagues and I introduced legislation that would help ensure continued emergency air ambulance services for Oahu residents, particularly rural Oahu.

With the deployment of the Army's helicopters and personnel to Iraq, MAST services are expected to be suspended through October 2007. We are seeking \$600,000 to fund the retrofitting and operation of Air National Guard Blackhawk helicopters for aeromedical emergency evacuations.

Hawaii Air Ambulance, a private company that already runs about 200 flights a month transporting patients from the Neighbor Islands to Oahu for treatment, can provide training of Army Reserve personnel and handle the dispatch.

Bill Advances to Address Del Monte Workers' Housing Crisis



Senator Ron Menor, joined by Senators Will Espero and Rosalyn Baker, announces the passage of his bill, SB 2773, from the Senate Commerce, Consumer Protection and Housing Committee. The bill appropriates money to help displaced Del Monte workers secure housing.

In response to Del Monte's announcement that it will close its 100-year-old pineapple operation, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection and Housing passed SB 2773 on January 15th. The bill focuses on the future housing needs of Del Monte Workers by providing a grant program to finance the purchase of the existing plantation homes, mortgage loans at below-market rates, rent supplements, loans to repair or rebuild some plantation homes, and money to help workers with down payments to buy their property. The legislation will not only help displaced workers secure housing, but also preserve important Agricultural lands. An estimated 700 unionized workers are set to lose their jobs by 2008 and more than 500 people could be left homeless if Kunia Camp is torn down or if its tenants are evicted.

For more information on what's happening this session or to track bills, look at committee hearing and briefing schedules, and much more, visit the State Legislature website at <http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov>.